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Testimony on SB 112

AN ACT PROVIDING CHILD CARE FOR ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS ENROLLED IN APPROVED HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

Education Committee March 2, 2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Merrill Gay and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success.

I am here tonight to testify in favor of SB 112. TANF recipients trying to get back into the workforce have always been the priority for the care4kids program. This bill **adds attendance in a two or four year college or university in pursuit of a degree to increase employability** to the list of employment services the Department of Labor may provide to TANF recipients. In doing so, it would also make the children of those TANF recipients eligible for the care4kids child care subsidy while their parents are in school.

Now to be clear, it is a very small percentage of TANF recipients who are college ready. This bill does not require the Commissioner of Labor to provide college to TANF recipients. It is permissive, adding college to the list of possible programs the Commissioner of Labor might deem appropriate. The bill also aligns the other parts of the statute to clarify that the childcare subsidy would also be available for those TANF recipients attending college as it is for those in any other approved job training program.

Let me lay out a scenario. A young woman graduates from high school, and enrolls in community college. She does well and gets accepted into the dental hygienist program. A year from graduating her mother is diagnosed with a debilitating disease. There is no one else, so she quits college to care for her mother. During this time she becomes a mother herself. Medical bills drain the family's savings and by the time her mother passes away they are behind in rent and being evicted. She turns to TANF because she has nothing else.

The job training programs that Department of Labor currently provides for TANF recipients are very short term and aimed at just getting recipients a job, any job. This current practice has succeeding in getting families off the TANF rolls but failed miserably at getting children out of



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poverty. Since 2003 the number of children in families receiving TANF has dropped almost in half from 56,357 to 23,934 in 2014. During that same time the number of children in poverty in Connecticut has increased from 93,322 in 2003 to 106,849 in 2014.

So let's go back to our college student who dropped out to care for her sick mother. With the current approach that focuses on finding a job quickly, having some college but no degree she'll be lucky to get a job paying \$12 or \$13 per hour. If she could finish the dental hygienist degree the starting salary is \$31.50 per hour. On that she could support her child, and not have to rely on HUSKY or SNAP.

So would this bill solve child poverty? No. Could it help some families earn a degree so that they could better support their children. Yes.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.